

Americanism has kept our country free

The following commentary on "Americanism" was excerpted from an essay posted on the Internet by the Disabled American Veterans organization, and was submitted by DAV member Guy Schein of the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office.

I'll bet you remember the following words from grade school and high school: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country. But he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

These words spoken by patriot Thomas Paine in 1776 have a meaning that rings in the hearts of the American people. Dangerous and uncertain days faced the 13 American colonies when he spoke these words in 1776. He knew a special kind of patriotic devotion and love of country was needed if the colonists were going to win their struggle for independence.

That special devotion helped them form a new nation dedicated to liberty. Today, we call that unique kind of patriotism "Americanism." For more than two centuries, Americanism has kept our country free.

What is Americanism? It's much more than patriotism alone, and it's more sincere than attitudes of self-righteousness. Americanism is the guardian of our Constitution. It's the driving force behind America's desire to prosper as a free nation.

The foremost characteristic of Americanism is the willingness of so many of our citizens to make sacrifices as individuals for the good of our nation's people as a whole. Such unselfishness is seen most touchingly in the sacrifices of the millions of men and women who died or became disabled while bearing arms in our nation's defense.

Patriotism is another trait of Americanism. But true patriotism goes beyond the waving of our country's flag and the singing of our National Anthem. Those are important gestures, to be sure, but true patriotism demands loyalty to the ideals that lie *behind*

those gestures. It calls forth loyalty to the traditions, the institutions and the courage that make our country great. It is out of patriotism that we exercise the rights we enjoy as Americans — rights first stated in the Declaration of Independence and later assured to us by our Constitution.

We practice Americanism whenever we vote. We also show Americanism when we take pride in our nation's achievements and commit ourselves to America's future ambitions.

Our nation's legendary generosity is a potent feature of our unique national spirit. Numerous government and nonprofit agencies provide assistance to people here and abroad in time of need.

Americanism is also about feelings. It's a shout of joy at an Olympic gold medal victory...sorrowful whispers at the death of a military member...and bitter anger at the false accusations directed at our nation by foreign governments. Each of us practices Americanism every day in our own way.

Citizens of every nation feel patriotism for their countries. But the loyalty and love of country felt by America's citizens are truly unique in today's selfish world. That's why America is the leader of the free world. That's why America has prospered and grown to such greatness in a mere two centuries. And that's why America will continue its world leadership as history writes new chapters in the future.

How can we practice Americanism? By voting on Election Day. By writing a letter or making a phone call to an elected leader. By answering the call to defend America and her Constitution in time of war. Americanism is the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of all of our nation's people.

This week, as we celebrate the 227th anniversary of our nation's independence, take a moment to remember all the freedoms we have to be grateful for as Americans, and especially remember those who have fought to protect those freedoms over the past two centuries. ■